

Hildebrand's Mill (Beck's Mill)
Flint vicinity
Delaware County
Oklahoma

HABS No. OK-29

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Hildebrand's Mill (Beck's Mill)

HABS No. OK-29

Location:

10 miles west of Siloam Springs, Arkansas; Flint vicinity, Delaware County, Oklahoma.

USGS Siloam Springs Northwest Quadrangle,
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
15/346540/4006880

Present Use:

Vacant.

Present Owner:

Mr. Kermit Beck, Rural Route #4, Siloam Springs, Arkansas.

Significance:

Hildebrand's Mill, turn of the century successor to the original 1845 mill, is one of the few remaining in Oklahoma which were provided for by treaty with the United States. As part of the compensation for the removal of 1839 and earlier removals from the East, mills came under the list of improvements which were due compensation. The site of numerous dramatic episodes of local history, the structure is fully equipped and operable as both saw- and grist-mill, some of the equipment dating back to the first mill.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physiscal History:

1. Date of erection: Between 1892 and 1902, most probably closer to the latter date.
2. Architect: The owner of the mill which had been destroyed by flood in 1892, Aaron Headin Beck, having had life-long experience in the mill business, built the structure.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The mill was first established on Flint Creek in 1845 by Mr. Towers. Within a short time he sold out to Stephen Hildebrand, for whom the mill is named. Hildebrand was married to Pauline Beck, who gained possession of the mill upon Hildebrand's death. Pauline married Mr. Kesterson, who lived at and operated the mill sometime prior to 1869. Pauline sold her interest to her nephew Aaron Headin Beck. A man named Mr. Taylor foreclosed on Beck for funds owed, and seems to have operated the business for a time. Beck regained control of the mill in partnership with Nathaniel

HILDEBRAND'S MILL
HABS No. OK-29 (Page 2)

Hastings Dial (the length of Dail's association with the mill is uncertain, but in 1886 he became postmaster for the area and kept post office at the mill). During the 1880s the mill came again into the sole possession of A.H. Beck. (reference to the foregoing: Littlefield and Underhill. There is at present no reliable source for dating the above changes in ownership). The first recorded transfer of the property is the original allotment deed, to wit:

Allotment Deed No. 13395
Cherokee Nation
to
Tony A. Beck
Book 21, Page 524
September 27, 1906
Recorded September 10, 1906
(reference is to the office of the Clerk, County of Delaware,
Delaware County Courthouse, Jay, Oklahoma)

The property has been in the Beck family since that time with no transfer other than by inheritance. During the years of the Cherokee Nation property the land was owned by the tribe, and no records were made for the early transfer of the property.

5. Original plans and construction: The structure was built to accommodate a roller mill originally, the extra height (three stories above ground) being necessary for the cleaning and preparation of grains finer than corn. The flour equipment was never procured or installed, however, and the third story was largely unused. The second story contains some work benches and hand tools, some of which are of considerable age, and was probably a shop for small repairs. There was also a separate workshop on the grounds. Some of the second floor was used as storage space. The first floor contained the grist machinery and the sawmill, which is open along one side. The entire building and its contents are virtually unchanged from the first years of use. A wooden track which carries a flat-bed on railroad car wheels, used for bringing logs into the mill, once extended a small distance into the open. Two cabinets were built in the grist room by Anthony Beck, the grantee of the 1906 allotment and the second generation of Becks to operate the mill. A water turbine, manufactured by Davis Foundry and Iron Works of Rome, Georgia, was installed to power the mill.

The mill was built entirely of materials procured and prepared on or near the site, and from the hills surrounding the valley in which the structure is situated. The 16" x 16" oak timbers of the foundations were hand-hewn by Oscar Ames, a neighbor and

relative of the Becks; the fittings and equipment were either salvaged from the old mill (e.g., the French-made corn buhrs) or ordered new (possibly from the Nordyke and Marmon Company of Indianapolis, Indiana, whose catalogue, circa 1885, is at the mill). Some of the fittings are of wood (a few cogs and gears), and may have been fashioned at the site, since more modern counterparts were readily available in iron at that time.

6. Alterations and additions: Other than the weathering of the exterior of the structure, no other changes of any significance have been found in the building. Various outbuildings have been removed, and the sluice which provided water power for both mills was enlarged from its original 4' x 4' to 8' x 8' by two workers hired by Hildebrand for a reported \$2,000 in gold (Beck interview). The Georgia-built water turbine was removed in 1935 and replaced with a gasoline engine.

In recent times a new roof covering of asphalt material was placed over original wooden shingles to protect the interior of the mill.

- B. Historical Context: A significant part of the economy of the Cherokee Nation was provided by the operations of mills of various functions. The availability of waterpower in the area at that time contributed to their proliferation, as did the funds of the United States Government. The latter were provided as part of the obligations of the United States as outlined in the various treaties governing the removal of the Cherokee Nation from its eastern home in the area where the states of Tennessee, North Carolina, Alabama and Georgia meet. Improvements made to the land in this area were to be justly compensated for under the Treaty of 1835. Normally such mills were constructed to operate both timber and grain milling machinery, the former being generally more profitable. This may be accounted for by the fact that timber could be cut by any citizen of the Nation who was able to use it, without cost. The details of this privilege are ambiguous. The laws, as published in 1875, stipulate that no citizen who operates a timber mill may occupy more than one "pinery", although it does not specify the size of the tract (An Act Protecting the Public Domain, 17 December 1869, p. 255). The law states further that no timber could be cut within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of the residence of any citizen of the Nation without that citizen's permission. This law was the first to attempt to regulate the sale of timber outside the Nation, requiring licenses for such sale, and levying a tax of 15%. Cutting of timber had apparently gotten out of hand, and the law was a step toward prevention of both the depletion of the nation's forests, and the advantage being taken by citizens of the United States at the expense of the Cherokees. This law proved difficult to enforce, and was amended several times, but it was never successfully. This is illustrated by the timber

operations at Hildebrand's Mill. Due to its location, the logical market for timber was Siloam Springs, Arkansas. Aaron Headin Beck and his partner, Nathaniel H. Dial, applied for the necessary licenses and filed bond on January 9, 1878 (in accordance with 1876 amendments). All such laws were repealed in 1878 by an act which made the sale of timber to non-citizens of the Cherokee Nation a crime (Act of Council, January 12, 1878). Beck and Dial were prosecuted under this law by the Court of the Goingsnake District. The ruling of the court was that it could find no basis in law to pursue the matter. By 1887, when a final attempt was made toward effective regulation, timber had been cut and sold without restriction for twenty years (Littlefield & Underhill, p. 90).

Law in the Cherokee Nation underwent a further test at the mill. By 1870s there was much contention between the courts of the Cherokee Nation and those of the United States over jurisdictional matters. It was determined that the Cherokee could only try its own citizens, and those of the United States involved in prosecution were being given over to the jurisdiction of the nearest federal courts, usually in Arkansas. On February 14, 1872, Pauline Beck Kesterson, who had inherited the mill from her late husband, Stephen Hildebrand, was murdered as the result of a quarrel between her present husband and Zeke Proctor (over a matter of cattle). Proctor was white, and had married a Cherokee, becoming entitled thereby to claim Cherokee citizenship. The Beck family felt that his trial in Cherokee courts would ensure his acquittal, and managed to have the federal courts try his case. During his trial a gunfight broke out which resulted in eleven deaths. The following weeks saw more violence, and an amnesty was declared to prevent it. Partly as a result of this conflict a United States District Court was established at Muskogee.

Numerous other incidents have occurred at the mill, including the execution of horse thieves and outlaws. These stories have become local legends.

During the Civil War, the mill was occupied by both the Union Army (1863) and that of the Confederacy (1862). Both sides seized flour from the mill. The confederates needed provisions. The North actually ran the mill for a time and distributed flour among the local population. The establishment was also visited by the Rev. Wiley of nearby Dwight Mission, who arrived in March of 1863 to secure planting corn to feed the families at the mission. He remained for a time to aid in the distribution of grain and meal to refugee families.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Hildebrand's Mill is the oldest extant mill structure in eastern Oklahoma, and it is complete with much of its original machinery and tools for both sawing wood and grinding grain.
2. Condition of fabric: Good; while some of the siding has decayed, a new roof has been installed to protect the interior. It stands much as it was built circa 1900.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The three-story mill measures 30' (three-bay front) x 40'.
2. Foundations: The foundation is limestone, which was found in the creek bank. 12-inch wooden square sill beams span 15 feet to several limestone piers on either side which rise from the creekbed to support the rear of the building. These piers are about ten feet high and four feet wide, and are well-mortared.
3. Walls: The walls are covered with unpainted 6" weatherboard siding, nailed over inch-thick diagonal board sheathing. Some of the sheathing measures 18 inches in width.
4. Structural system, framing: The wooden post-and-beam system is dependent primarily on its diagonal sheathing for lateral support. A frame structure, the 2" x 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " studs are placed 18" on center with four 10" square corner posts and three interior columns of the same dimensions. These studs and columns are atop 12" square sill beams and a 14" square center beam which carry the 3" x 9" floor joists.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are two vertical board batten doors in the center of the front facade at the first floor level, and one in the center of the front facade at either the second or third floor level. All have simple board enframements. The right hand door on the first floor has been sawn in half across its width, to provide a "Dutch door" arrangement.
 - b. Windows and shutters: There are no shutters. The windows are all wooden double-hung sash, each with four-over-four lights and plain wooden enframement.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is a simple gable, with its ridge perpendicular to the principal facade. It is presently covered with composition asphalt shingles, which have been recently installed. Beneath these shingles, on the inside, are the original wood shingles, which are nailed on 1" x 4"s and spaced on 6" intervals.
- b. Eaves: The rafters are exposed at the eaves.
- c. Monitor: There is a small frame ventilating monitor with louvered sides and similarly covered gable roof astride the center of the ridge of the roof of the mill.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The first floor can be entered by means of either of the two doors which are in the center of the front facade on the first floor level. These are astride a longitudinal wall which divides the meal grinding room on the right, from the sawmill room on the left. The latter has no exterior wall, so that access to that area may also be directly from the left hand side of the building, at any point. A vertical board and horizontal batten door connects the two sides of the first floor near the rear of the structure.

The second floor, accessible only by means of a narrow enclosed corner staircase in the northernmost corner of the building (just inside the right hand front door), is a single open room, presently used for parts and equipment storage. A ladder over the staircase leads to third floor, which is also a single open room, now virtually vacant.

2. Stairways: The staircase from the first to the second floor is immediately to the right of the right hand first floor front door, in the northernmost corner of the building. It is a wooden winder stairs, enclosed in four-inch wooden siding with a vertical board and horizontal batten door. The stairs from the second to the third floor are of two-by-twelve plank construction, with only two string boards and treads. It is a steep single-flight. Access to the few boards which are laid across the joists forming the ceiling of the third floor is by means of a ladder, infrequently used.
3. Flooring: The first floor has 6-inch tongue-and-groove board flooring. The second and third floors have 4-inch tongue-and-groove board flooring. All are approximately 3/4" thick, and have always been unpainted.

HILDEBRAND'S MILL
HABS No. OK-29 (Page 7)

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The interior surfaces of the studs, diagonal sheathing and the weatherboards provide the only walls, and the bottom of the joists and flooring provide the only ceilings. All are unpainted.
5. Doorways and doors: There is only one interior door, a simple horizontal batten and vertical board door on the first floor between the grinding mill room on the right and the sawmill room on the left. It is enframed in plain flat boards, four inches in width and half-inch thick.
6. Hardware: The round porcelain doorknobs, rectangular stamped metal door latches and locks seem to be original to the building.
7. Mechanical equipment: There are no heating, cooling or plumbing systems in the mill. A few bare incandescent bulbs provide the auxiliary lighting.

The largest amount of mechanical equipment is related, of course, to the milling operations. The grinding buhrs, which were used in the mill which preceded this one (1845), are 48" in diameter, and are single pieces of marble, imported from France. These buhrs are equipped with a running and a standing balance for leveling the stones, and a wooden crane for removing the buhrs. Several wooden cast-iron wheels, such as one 30" in diameter and 9" in width, beneath the buhrs, were run by 6" wide belts.

The 36" circular saw blade was powered by belts and wheels, which was fed by a cast-iron log carriage with a 42" wide wheelbase.

D. Site:

- a. General setting and orientation: The mill is situated at the end of a drive which parallels Flint creek, forming the front edge of a 99 $\frac{1}{4}$ acre farm. Most of the farm has been given over to cattle grazing, but the front yard, at the edge of which the mill sits, is of low mown grass with a few rock outcroppings. Behind the mill, next to the creek, a few trees have grown up, along with a dense undergrowth. The mill faces east-northeast.
- b. Outbuildings The mill is part of a farm which consists of a single-story frame Colonial cottage, and its outbuildings: a frame barn, moved from alongside the mill to near the house,

frame hip-roofed garage with a lean-to addition, three cow barns which are single-story shed structures, an outhouse of concrete block and a frame chicken house now no longer used.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Early Views: An old photo of the wooden flume is available from the journal, Chronicles of Oklahoma, Spring 1970, ol. XLVIII, No. 1, pp. 83-94.

B. Interviews:

Interview with Kermit Beck, August 11 and 17, 1975. Mr. Beck is the current owner of the property and lives at the site.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Oklahoma Historical Society. Indian-Pioneer History Collection. Interviews: Stanley A. Clark, vol. 65, pp. 147-149., E.H. Whitmore, Vol. 11, pp. 371-376, February 20, 1937.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Oklahoma Historical Society. Indian Archives. Letter, dated February 1, 1878, from Charles Thompson, Principal Chief, to D.W. Bushyhead, National Treasurer.

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2. Secondary and published sources:

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Oklahoma Historical Society. Published laws of Cherokee National Council. "An Act For the Protection of Public Domain", December 6, 1869., "An Act to Amend An Act Entitled 'An Act For the Protection of the Public Domain', Approved December 17th 1869", December 8, 1876., "An Act Prohibiting Any Person From Transporting Timber or Sawed Lumber Beyond the Cherokee Nation", January 12, 1878., "An Act of Regulate the Sale to Noncitizens of Sawed Lumber and Provide for a Tax", November 30, 1878.

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HILDEBRAND'S MILL
HABS No. OK-29 (Page 9)

Ellifritt, Duane S., Principal Investigator. Historic American Engineering Record, State of Oklahoma - Inventory. Stillwater, Oklahoma: School of Civil Engineering, Oklahoma State University, January 1974.

Littlefield, Daniel F., and Underhill, Lonnie E. "Hildebrand's Mill Near Flint, Cherokee Nation", Chronicles of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Historical Society (Spring 1970): vol. XLVIII, No. 1, pp. 83-94.

"Grist Mills", Article XXII of the Cherokee Constitution, published laws, 1875 edition.

"An Act Authorizing the Sale and Shipment of Lumber", December 4, 1886, took effect March 16, 1887.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Oklahoma Historical Society and the Cherokee National Historical Society. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1975, at the HABS Field Office on the campus of Northeastern Oklahoma State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, by Michael A. Tomlan (Cornell University), Project Supervisor; John D. Hnedak (Cornell University), Project Historian; Bethanie C. Grashof (University of Florida), Vicki J. Higgins (University of Cincinnati), Nicholas H. Holmes III (Auburn University) and Roger D. Swayze (University of Oregon), student assistant architects. The written descriptive data was edited for permanent HABS collection at the Library of Congress by Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, in the winter of 1981. Walter Smalling, Jr. of Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, U.S. Department of the Interior took the documentary photos of the building in October of 1979.